

## For the Appropriations Committee: Bill 6659 - Increase Patient Pay & Work Hours

I am asking that you please increase the pay and number of available work hours for NGRI patients, to help us meet a certain quality of living and sustain us during our stay in the hospital. The cost of living in CT has gone up drastically recently. Minimum wage will soon be \$15/hr. and will continue to increase in accordance with inflation. At the same time, our hourly wage was decreased from \$9.15 to \$7.25, while our number of hours we are allowed to work per week was cut all the way down to 2. We need money to buy simple things. For example, the state does supply certain things like shoes, but after walking in them for a month, I started having severe pain, so I needed to buy my own. We need to buy our own clothes. This is one way to express our individuality to reclaim a sense of identity that was lost during our illness. An increase to \$12/hr. would help a lot if more hours are also made available.

There are numerous studies that support employment for people with psychiatric disabilities. Our self-esteem is improved by having a sense of purpose which in turn reduces symptoms. We engage with people and learn new skills. This helps us with our transition back into the community which is one of the most vulnerable times. Having some money saved to furnish our apartment and feel secure can prevent money stressors and a return to the hospital.

Work is one of the cornerstones of a patient's recovery and the program is getting the least amount of resources allocated to it. There is currently one vocational staff for 140 patients. Five new positions are now supposed to finally be made available this week. We need to make sure these additional staff are actually used to provide more employment opportunities for the patients. A café used to be open on campus where residents could work. They gained real world skills, a sense of responsibility and all the above mentioned benefits. It was shut down in 2016 because it was deemed too expensive to run. There was no reason for the business to operate at a loss. Even if the needed adjustments weren't made, and menu prices and the number of state employees working there stayed the same, the benefits that patients were receiving was money well spent. The café needs to re-open and stay open. More job sites like this need to be created. There used to be a carpenter shop, a baker shop, a farm, housekeeping and groundskeeper jobs. Work hits on every aspect of the recovery model for patients. Please help bring this back to WFH.

Sincerely,

Aaron Ramsey